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ABSTRACT

Educational psychology departments should offer to interested students throughout the university a parent education course stressing child development and the educational process. As a result of declining enrollments in schools of education, professors of educational psychology need to develop new courses applicable to new student populations. Already some medical and dental schools offer courses in learning theory and evaluation, so a precedent has been set. Furthermore, a course such as parent education is highly relevant and has a historical tradition. As early as 1820, national groups sought to help parents be more effective with their children's moral and religious development. In the 20th century emphasis turned to emotional and personality growth. More recently parent education has stressed cognitive growth. Currently parent education courses are usually offered through home economics departments. These courses focus on family life, child rearing, and child development, and are topically rather than chronologically oriented. These courses neglect the important interrelationships of school, parent, and child. By covering these issues an educational psychology course could make a significant contribution to education. Such a course would examine the impact of the school on the child, and more specifically, the teacher's role as the facilitator of the child's achievement. The course would stress parental involvement and communication with school officials, and would cover the parents' role as teachers of their own children. The document contains a short bibliography. (BC)

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Parent Education: Implications for Educational Psychology

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Due to the recent teacher surplus, preservice teacher education, the largest enrollment of any single program in higher education, has undergone a sever decline in enrollment. In 1972, teacher education programs enrolled a third of all undergraduates, by 1975, this proportion dropped to less than 20% (Kuuskraa and Morra, 1977). Since educational psychology is a required course in the certification process, instructors were guaranteed large enrollments during the growth period of the 1960's. Unfortunately, the recent decline in teacher education has had a direct influence on the size of the student population in educational psychology courses. While there will always be a role for educational psychology in teacher preparation, it is evident that the size of the program will remain at a smaller level as compared to the past.

Now for the good news! In recent years educational psychology has been applied to a variety of new settings. For example, we have seen medical and dental schools incorporate courses in learning theory and evaluation in their curricula. Also, students trained in measurement and evaluation have found positions in mental health agencies and in civil service agencies, such as police and fire departments.

The success of these developments suggest that instructors in undergraduate programs should consider developing courses directed toward new student populations who could benefit from studying educational psychology. The justification for this new thrust can be attributed to the relevancy of the field, or to survival needs, or to a combination of both.

I shall argue, in this paper, for the development of a special undergraduate educational psychology course in parent education directed

toward liberal arts and other non-education majors. I will present a brief history and rationale for parent education, discuss the present status of parent education courses in colleges and universities, and conclude by developing some parameters for the content for an undergraduate course.

History and Rationale for Parent Education

Parent education received a great deal of attention in the 1960's because of the support from Head Start programs. Yet, parent education is not a new development. Reports of child-rearing advice were communicated to mothers as early as the eighteenth century (Brim,1959). In the late 1800's national groups developed that greatly increased organized efforts in parent education. These groups attempted to educate parents in child development to help them become more effective child-rearers.

The focus of parent education has changed from 1820 to the present. In the nineteenth century it emphasized children's moral and religious development. In the twentieth century, the focus changed to children's emotional and personality growth. The most recent emphasize of parent education is organized around cognitive growth. This orientation began in the early 1960's to help meet the educational needs of low income children. In discussing these programs, Goodson and Hess (1975) stated:

> The desire to improve the child's educational performance and the view of the family as a contributor to his problems in school eventually made the family, especially mothers, targets for intervention efforts (p.12)

These programs are based on several assumptions (Goodson and Hess, 1975). The first, the home deficit assumption, is that the home environment

did not properly prepare the child for entry into school. This assumption is based on research showing the differences between middle-and lower-income homes on a number of variables related to the child's development.

The second assumption, drawing from research on criterial periods in development, is that the early years of development set the pace and direction for cognitive growth. Bloom's (1964) research relating early deprivation to future intellectual growth is often quoted as support for this assumption.

The third assumption, the family effects assumption, is that the impact of the family is not usually overcome by later schooling. The data from the Coleman Report (1966) and various reanalysis of the original data have suggested the important role of the family on the educational achievement of children. For example, Mayeske et al. (1973) reported that for all social-ethnic groups combined, "48 percent of achievement was attributed to Family Background." The authors conclude that what is really important for parents is "the nature of their involvement in the educational process (p.14)."

The concern with developing skills that would improve child-rearing practices and prepare young children for success in school has not been confined to programs designed for low- income parents. (Goodson and Hess, 1975). The stress of child-rearing, coupled with lack of information about child development, education, and the parental role, has caused middle-income parents to become equally concerned with parent education. The success of programs like Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1970) is an example of such interest. Further evidence is seen by the range of educational records, toys, magazines and television programs oriented toward both lower- and middle-income families.

Lastly, the need for parent education for all types of parents was clearly spelled out by the 1970 White House Conference on children which presented alarming evidence concerning the incidence of child abuse, child accidents, infant mortality rates, and mental retardation in America. While deficiencies in parenting skills are not the only factor playing a role in producing these problems, it is believed that they may be alleviated by increased parental competencies developed through improved parent education (Kruger, 1973).

Parent Education Courses in Colleges and Universities

Family life and parent educators constantly urge the establishment of parent education courses at all educational levels. The college and university level can provide important information for young adults who may be anticipating marriage and child-rearing. My colleagues in the sociology department at the University of Southern California tell me that the course "Education for Marriage" is one of the most popular elective courses at the University. Students often wait one or two semesters to gain admission into one of the four or five sections of the course.

Recently, Holt, Rinehart and Winston surveyed 61 institutions regarding the nature and scope of their parent education courses. I was able to obtain their data along with syllabi of courses from twenty-five institutions which enabled me to analyze the courses in detail.[1]

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[1] I would like to thank Louise Waller at Holt, Rinehart and Winston for sharing this data with me.

Most of the current courses in parent education are offered in home economics departments. A small number are found in family life and child development programs. The course titles vary widely. The most frequent are "Parent Education," "Parent-Child Relationships," or "Child Development". Some variation of "Parenting" or "Parenthood" is also popular. Most of the courses focus on a combination of family life, child-rearing, and child development with very little agreement on most topics and issues. The courses appear to be topically rather than chronologically oriented. Most courses included some field work; i.e. observations, interviews, etc. The following are examples of the variety of objectives found in the courses:

1. to recognize the influences of the family on the child development.
2. to identify effective principles and techniques for guiding behavior.
3. to identify and differentiate community services and facilities available to children and families.
4. to accept oneself as a parent when the time comes.
5. to familiarize the student with what the popular media is saying about parenting.
6. to observe preschool programs to gain knowledge of children's behavior patterns.
7. to develop a personal philosophy of child-rearing.

Thirty-eight texts were listed among those that were required. The most frequent listed were Le Master's Parents in Modern America, Smart and Smart's Families' Developing Relationships, Dodson's How to Parent, Dinkmeyer's Raising a Responsible Child, and Dreikers' Children.

In a similar survey, Kerckhoff, et al. (1976) reported the lack of material directed primarily at the parenting process which was not a repeat of the traditional child development literature.

Educational Psychology and Parent Education

Although the present parenting courses focus on important aspects of child-rearing and development, they do neglect some important educational areas related to the relationships among the school, parent, and child. It is here that I believe undergraduate educational psychology can offer an unique contribution to the field.

Figure 1 identifies the relationships among the three key components in the educational process. It is important that the parent have knowledge and skills pertaining to each of these relationships. This model can be used to develop the basis of a course focusing on school (teacher) - child, school (teacher) - parent, and parent - child relationships.

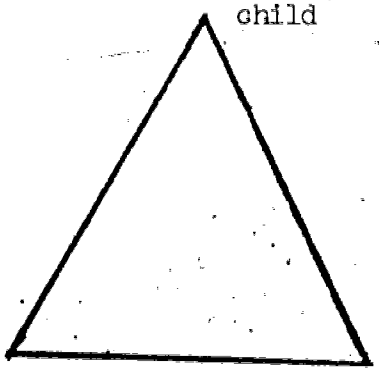

fig. 1 Relationship among three important components in the education process.

School (teacher) - child relationships pertain to the impact of the school as an institution, and more specifically, the teacher in facilitating the child's achievement. The following are some important knowledge and skills for a parent:

1. to identify laws and regulations for preschools, daycare, private elementary, and secondary schools.
2. to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of schools, i.e. Montessori, open structure, fundamental.
3. to identify how different grouping and tracking procedures can influence the expectation and achievement of students.
4. to identify how teacher behavior and expectations can influence student behavior and achievement.
5. to analyze different teaching methods according to various learning and instructional theories and principles.
6. to identify programs and regulations pertaining to services for the exceptional child.

School (teacher) - parent relationships involve direct parental involvement and communication with school officials. The following are some important knowledge and skills for the parent:

1. to interpret educational reports and school records.
2. to hold an effective parent-teacher conference.
3. to make recommendations to school officials about improving the learning program for a child.

4. to participate in decision-making through advisory board memberships.

5. to volunteer to work in the classroom.

The third relationship, parent-child, directly involves parents as more effective teachers of their own children, and as better parents. The following are some important competencies in this area:

1. to identify characteristics of a child's behavior at different stages of development.
2. to identify effective principles or techniques for guiding behavior.
3. to describe individual differences in children's personality, learning style, and social development.
4. to tutor a child at home.
5. to select appropriate toys and games for enhancing cognitive development and school achievement.
6. to provide information to children about drug and sex education.
7. to identify conditions affecting child abuse.

The competencies related to each of the above relationships are not an exhaustive list. They are provided to indicate some of the educational expertise that parents should acquire. It should also be mentioned that there is often an overlap among the relationships. That is to say, some situations may involve teacher-child, parent-child and parent-teacher interactions at the same time. Therefore, there may be some disagreement as to the category which certain objectives were placed.

Lastly, whereas the competencies in the child-parent category is similar in some respects to the content in present parent education courses, competencies identified in the remaining categories do not overlap with the present courses.

Having been involved in university-wide cuuriculum committees, I am aware of the territorial disputes that can occur between various schools and departments regarding new courses. If no such parent education course exists at a college, it may be easier to establish the course in a School of Education or educational psychology department. If a course presently exists, you should attempt to emphasize the educational orientation of the course to your colleagues. Finally, while I have suggested three components to the course, its orientation can be modified to compliment any existing program.

In summary, an important dimension of becoming a more effective parent involves knowledge concerning child development and the educational process. Educational psychology can make an important contribution to this area of parent education. As a result, educational psychology departments should consider expanding their programs to include a parent education course for interested students throughout the college or university.

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